

Panama Judge Asks Interpol to Help Catch Ex-President Martinelli on Charges of Financial Fraud

By [Telesur](#)

Global Research, June 29, 2016

[Telesur](#) 29 June 2016

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A judge in Panama asked Interpol on Tuesday to help arrest the country's ex-president Ricardo Martinelli over charges of embezzlement and illegal spying on political rivals, police said.

Judge Jerónimo Mejía asked the international police to launch a "red notice" against the ex-president, meaning a preventive arrest in the United States, where he is reportedly hiding from Panama's justice, in order to process to his extradition to Panama.

"The national police received the demand and it was immediately sent to the Interpol office" in France, where will be decided whether to accept the request or not, said the head of the force, Omar Pinzon.

"They immediately began procedures according to international police norms."

Panama's Supreme Court ordered Martinelli's arrest in December after the former president, known to be hiding out in Miami, failed to show up to a Panamanian court for a much-anticipated hearing on his case.

He was declared in contempt, and judges called for his detention while investigations into charges of corruption and illegal espionage continued.

Last month, the Supreme Court rejected appeals by Martinelli's legal team to have the arrest warrant overturned.

The foreign ministry on June 9 said it wanted the [United States to extradite him](#).

Martinelli, a millionaire businessman, is accused of corruption, selling pardons, insider trading, and of tapping at least 150 opponents' and journalists' phones and emails during his 2009-2014 presidency.

He fled Panama in January 2015 just before the Supreme Court launched the probe in his suspected corruption and exiled himself in Miami, where we made a request for U.S. political asylum.

Martinelli denies being guilty of wrongdoing and his defense claims the legal process is a form of political persecution.

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